

IN THE CLAIMS

Claim 1 (currently amended): In a guarded surgical scalpel, wherein a blade is mounted on a cleat on the scalpel, wherein a guard is moved rearwardly on the scalpel to expose the blade, wherein a blade stripper is thereafter moved forwardly and longitudinally of the scalpel to engage the rear portion of the blade and deflect the rear portion of the blade away from the cleat on the scalpel, and wherein the guard is then moved forwardly on the scalpel to strip the blade off the cleat and thus remove the blade from the scalpel, ~~the~~ an improvement comprising a manually-releasable lock on the blade stripper to prevent an accidental or inadvertent stripping of the blade off the scalpel, thereby requiring a two-hand operation and preventing an accidental or inadvertent stripping of the blade during a surgical procedure.

Claim 2 (original): The improvement of claim 1, wherein the scalpel includes a depressible top button, and wherein the lock comprises a locking stud carried by the depressible top button, and a hook on the blade stripper receiving the locking stud.

Claim 3 (currently amended): The improvement of claim 2, wherein the guard and the blade stripper move longitudinally of the scalpel, respectively, and wherein the locking stud is disposed transversely to the respective longitudinal movement of the guard and blade stripper; and wherein the blade stripper is movable independently of the guard.

Claim 4 (original): The improvement of claim 2, wherein the depressible top button is part of a leaf spring that is pivotably disposed within the scalpel.

Claim 5 (original): The improvement of claim 2, wherein the depressible top button also carries a transverse detent pin, wherein the guard has a closed slot within which the detent pin slides, and wherein the closed slot has a pair of detent pockets, one at each end thereof for receiving the detent pin, thereby providing a two-position manually-releasable detented position of the guard, and thereby precluding complete removal of the guard off the scalpel.

Claim 6 (original): The improvement of claim 5, wherein the respective detent pin and locking stud on the depressible top button are disposed oppositely of each other.

Claim 7 (original): The improvement of claim 1, wherein the blade stripper has a forward edge which is beveled and includes an incline, and wherein the beveled forward edge slides under the rear portion of the blade and cams the blade away from the cleat on the scalpel to eject the blade as the rear portion of the blade rides up the incline on the beveled forward edge of the blade stripper.

Claim 8 (original): The improvement of claim 6, wherein the forward edge of the blade stripper comprises a compound beveled forward edge.

Claim 9 (currently amended): In a guarded surgical scalpel, wherein a blade is mounted on a cleat on the main body portion of the scalpel, wherein a guard is moved rearwardly on the main body portion of the scalpel to expose the blade, wherein a blade stripper is moved forwardly to engage the rear portion of the blade and deflect the rear portion of the blade away from the cleat on the scalpel, and wherein the guard is then moved forwardly on the scalpel to strip the blade off the cleat and thus remove the blade from the scalpel, the guard and the blade stripper moving longitudinally of the scalpel, ~~the~~ an improvement comprising a manually-releasable blade stripper lock to prevent an

accidental or inadvertent stripping of the blade off the scalpel, the blade stripper lock including a depressible top button, the depressible top button carrying a locking stud disposed transversely of the longitudinal sliding movement of the guard, the depressible top button being formed on a leaf spring that is pivotably disposed within the main body portion of the scalpel, a hook on the blade stripper receiving the locking stud, wherein the depressible top button also carries a transverse detent pin, wherein the guard has a closed slot within which the detent pin slides, and wherein the closed slot has a pair of detent pockets, one at each end thereof for receiving the detent pin, thereby providing a two-position manually-releasable detented position of the guard, and thereby precluding complete removal of the guard off the scalpel, wherein the respective detent pin and locking stud on the depressible top button are disposed oppositely of each other, and wherein the blade stripper has a forward edge which is beveled and includes an incline, and wherein the beveled forward edge slides under the rear portion of the blade and cams the blade away from the cleat on the scalpel to position the blade for ejection as the rear portion of the blade rides up the incline on the beveled forward edge of the blade stripper, and thereafter the guard is moved forward to eject the blade; and wherein the blade stripper is movable independently of the guard.

Claim 10 (currently amended): In combination, a guarded surgical scalpel having a guard and a blade stripper movable independently of the guard, and a blade stripper lock requiring a two-hand operation to prevent inadvertent or accidental movement of the blade stripper during normal use or handling of the guarded surgical scalpel.

Claim 11 (original): The combination of claim 10, wherein the guarded surgical scalpel includes a handle and further includes a guard adapted for longitudinal sliding movement thereon, and wherein the blade stripper lock comprises a button on the handle of the scalpel, the button carrying a locking stud disposed transversely of the longitudinal sliding movement of the guard, and a hook on blade stripper to receive the locking stud.

Claim 12 (original): The combination of claim 11, wherein the button on the scalpel comprises a depressible top button.

Claim 13 (original): The combination of claim 12, wherein the depressible top button is carried by a leaf spring on the handle of the scalpel.

Claim 14 (canceled).

Claim 15 (canceled).

Claim 16 (currently amended): ~~The~~ A method of using a blade stripper in a guarded surgical scalpel, wherein the scalpel carries a blade mounted forwardly thereon, and wherein the scalpel is provided with a guard and is further provided with a blade stripper movable independently of the guard, comprising the steps of providing a first element ~~carried by the scalpel~~ and a second element ~~carried by the blade stripper~~ and engaging the first element on the scalpel; a lock-off on the blade stripper, thereby precluding an inadvertent or accidental movement of the blade stripper during use or handling of the guarded surgical scalpel, retracting the guard on the scalpel, moving the first element on the scalpel away from the second element on the blade stripper, thereby clearing the second element on the blade stripper from the first element on the scalpel; disabling the blade

stripper lock-off, advancing the blade stripper forwardly of the scalpel to engage the rearward portion of the blade and position the rearward portion of the blade for subsequent engagement by the guard, and advancing the guard forwardly of the scalpel to engage the positioned rearward portion of the blade and eject it the blade from the scalpel, thereby requiring a two-hand operation.

Claim 17 (currently amended): The method of claim 16, wherein the ~~first element on the scalpel~~ blade stripper lock-off comprises a locking stud on a depressible top button formed on a leaf spring portion of the scalpel, and wherein the ~~second element on the blade stripper~~ comprises has a hook ~~on the blade stripper~~ receiving the locking stud on the depressible top button.